



# The Lincoln Kinsman

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## THE HERRINGS OF VIRGINIA

### SEARCHING FOR FACTS ABOUT LINCOLN'S PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER

FOUR Virginia families, the Shipleys, Boones, Winters, and Herrings, have attempted to gather information which would allow them to identify the paternal grandmother of Abraham Lincoln with their kinsmen. However, the folk-lore and tradition which would make Bathsheba Herring the wife of Grandfather Lincoln seems to have been accepted generally in recent years.

There can be no doubt about the given name of the woman who was left a widow by the massacre of Grandfather Lincoln in the wilderness of Kentucky. Her name was Bathsheba. There is no document available, however, which affirms that the family name of Bathsheba was Herring and one is entirely dependent upon reminiscences for this assertion.

#### *The Pioneer's Bride*

It is unfortunate, indeed, that the notice of Grandfather Lincoln's mar-

riage in 1770, recorded in the Augusta County, Virginia records does not reveal the name of his bride. The problem of learning her maiden name has been further complicated by the persistent tradition that Grandfather Lincoln was married twice, although there is no authoritative evidence supporting this claim.

Still more confusing is the story prepared for early biographers by James N. Nall, a great grandson of the widow Lincoln. He claimed that her maiden name was Mary Shipley, and inasmuch as he was a direct descendant and an influential citizen as well, his testimony bore much weight. The fact that one of the widow's children was named Mary, presumably for her mother, also contributed to the acceptance of the Nall story. The editor of *The Lincoln Kinsman* has in his possession a letter by John Nall on the subject of Lincoln's ancestry from which the following excerpt is made.

"Carthage, Mo. Feb. 11—95

"C. Hanks Hitchcock

"Dear Sir

"In reply to your favor of the 6th Inst. I beg leave to say I am not posted as to the geneology of the Hanks family. About all I know is that Nancy Hanks wife of my Uncle Thomas Lincoln and mother of the President came from North Carolina and lived with her Uncle Richard Berry in Washington Co. Ky. until She married my uncle Thomas Lincoln on the 23rd of Sept 1806. Richard Berrys wife was a Shipley. I Suppose Nancys mother was was Berrys Sister as he was her uncle Thomas Lincolns mother and Richard Berrys mother were sisters, Both Shiplies.

"I have the honor of being quoted as the best living authority on the geneology of the Lincoln family. I have made this a life Study because of the pride I take in my Maternal Ancestors. You ask me if Thomas Lincoln married Lucy Shipley or Lucy Berry; he married Nancy Hanks as before stated, his father Abraham married Mary Shipley and Richard Berry married Lucy Shipley. . . .

"Yours truly,

"J. L. Nall"

In conflict with the Herring and Shipley traditions are two other stories relating to the paternal ancestry of President Lincoln, one recognizes Ann Boone as the grandmother and the other Hanniah or Elizabeth Winters as occupying the grandmother relationship to the President. Re-

gardless of the family history released by Mr. Nall and the printed statements about Boone and Winters connections, the Herring tradition seems to be the most persistent one and worthy of being given the preference.

### *Herring Family Reminiscences*

The reluctance with which some students of Lincolniana have accepted the Herring tradition is largely due to the fact that there has been much division of opinion as to the parentage of Bathsheba Herring, if her name was Herring, among the members of the Herring family themselves.

In 1908, Charles Griffin Herring, then living at Harrisonburg, Virginia wrote a letter to J. Henry Lea, in which he said:

"Bathsheba Herring, as I recall it, was a daughter of Leonard Herring, and was born on the old plantation near Bridgewater in Rockingham County, Virginia."

When Mr. Lea, in collaboration with Mr. Hutchinson, brought out in 1909, the book *The Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln*, he mentioned Major George Chrisman, living in the Lincoln country in Virginia and stated:

"He (Major Chrisman) is third cousin of the President, being son of George Harrison Chrisman by Martha Herring, daughter of Alexander Herring, only son of William, who was the brother of Leonard Herring, the father of Bathsheba, wife of Abra-

ham Lincoln, grandfather of the President."

One member of the family, William H. Chrisman, published a pamphlet in 1927 in which he made the following statement in the foreword:

"Abraham Lincoln's grandmother, Bathsheba Herring, and Herring Chrisman's great grandfather, John Herring, were brother and sister."

It will be observed from these testimonies that at first it was believed by members of the Herring family that Bathsheba was a daughter of Leonard Herring. Dr. W. E. Barton in his book on *The Lineage of Lincoln* published as late as 1929 states that Bathsheba was "probably the daughter of Leonard Herring." It was shown, however, through the public records that Leonard did not marry until 1760. If Bathsheba was born the year Leonard was married she could not have been more than nine years old in 1780 at the time she was supposed to have married Abraham Lincoln, the pioneer.

### *The Early American Herrings*

It became very evident from these accounts that Bathsheba could not have been a daughter of Leonard Herring except by an earlier marriage of which there is no record. The conclusion now is that Bathsheba must have been a daughter of Alexander Herring and a sister of Leonard. With this supposition as a basis from which to work out her family connection, we may attempt a brief account of the Herring family

of Virginia and its relation to Abraham Lincoln's ancestry.

The earliest reference to a member of the Herring family in America from which it is thought the paternal grandmother of Lincoln descended is found in a deed book in the Court House at Georgetown, Delaware. (Book 1, page 245). On November 4, 1719, Alexander Herron (Herring) then residing in Sussex County, purchased of Edward Bran of the same county, one hundred and eighty acres of land on "the South side of a Branch called Ivery Branch proceeding from Rehoboth Bay."

Alexander and his wife, Margaret, had four children: one son, Alexander Jr., and three daughters, Esther Wood, Sarah Prettyman, and Eady Herring. These children were named in the senior Alexander's will, dated September 19, 1735, and to Alexander, Jr., was left the homestead acquired from Edward Bran. (Sussex County, Delaware, Will Book A., No. 1, Pages 288-289.)

In the same county with the Herrings lived the family of Isaiah Harrison. He was twice married, first to Elizabeth Wright by whom he had five children: Isaiah, John, Gideon, Mary, and Elizabeth; and second to Abigail Smith, who became the mother of five children by him, namely: David, Thomas, Jeremiah, Abigail, and Samuel.

It is this last group of Harrison children in which we have the most interest and especially in Abigail who married Alexander Herring, Junior, only son of the Delaware pioneer. Abigail was born in 1710 and while still living in Sussex

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County, Delaware, the above mentioned wedding took place.

Alexander Herring, Senior, and Isaiah Harrison passed away while residing in Delaware. Both died within the three year period beginning in 1735 and concluding in 1738. Shortly after their deaths, the migrations of their children to Virginia began. Some of the Harrisons were settled in the vicinity of what is now Harrisonburg, Virginia in Rockingham County as early as 1738.

Alexander Herring Jr. and his wife, Abigail Harrison Herring sold the land in Delaware which Alexander had inherited from his father, the deed bearing the date of May 5, 1742. This probably marks the time of their migration to Virginia and they soon settled among the Harrisons on Linville Creek.

Three years later Alexander was serving as a road surveyor or overseer but it was not until 1749 that the first land purchase was credited to him. At that time he acquired 365 acres on Cooks Creek adjacent to Daniel Harrison. In 1751, a deed from Samuel Harrison conveyed to him property on Linville Creek in

the community where he settled when first coming to Virginia.

Alexander and Abigail Herring are said to have had five sons and one daughter. The names of the sons are known through the discovery of a deed of bargain and sale from Leonard Herring the oldest son to his brothers, named Alexander, William, Bethuel and Jesse. The name of the traditional daughter, although nowhere found in the public records associated with the sons of the pioneer Herring, is said to have been Bathsheba.

*Lincoln and Herring Contacts*

In 1768 there moved into the Linville Creek community, a man by the name of John Lincoln, who had a family of five sons and four daughters. The three oldest sons were named Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the other two John and Thomas. The names of the daughters were Hannah, Lydia, Sarah, and Rebecca.

On June 9, 1770, Abraham, the oldest son of John Lincoln was granted a license to marry but the name of the bride is omitted from the record. The assumption is that the bride was Bathsheba Herring, only daughter of Alexander Herring. If it can be established that Bathsheba was the daughter of Alexander Herring we will be able to trace the ancestral line of President Lincoln back to the pioneer Alexander Herring of Delaware and also to the pioneer Isaiah Harrison of Delaware, whose children Alexander and Abigail, respectively, were the parents of Bathsheda Herring Lincoln.



One reminiscence which has come down with reference to this marriage would leave the impression that there was much objection on the part of the Herring family to this matrimonial venture. The story as it is often told runs something like this:

"Abraham Lincoln, who married Bathsheba Herring was a poor and rather plain man. Her aristocratic father looked with scorn on the alliance and gave his daughter the choice of giving up her lover or being disinherited. The high-spirited young woman did not hesitate. She married the man she loved and went with him to the savage wilds of Kentucky in 1782. Her husband was afterwards killed by an Indian, and one of her sons, a lad of 12 years, killed the Indian, avenging his father's death. Bathsheba Herring was a woman of fine intelligence and strong character. She was greatly loved and respected by all who knew her."

This story did very much to encourage the theory that Abraham Lincoln, the Virginia pioneer, was married twice and that Bathsheba was his second wife. It would be reasonable to expect that a father might object to a young girl marrying a widower with three or four children and going off with him to Kentucky. But Alexander Herring, father of Bathsheba, had been dead five years before the migration of the Lincolns took place.

The tradition advanced by the Herring family that Bathsheba was the one and only wife of Abraham Lincoln would directly challenge the implication that there was a serious

and permanent cleavage between Alexander Herring and his daughter Bathsheba. The Lincolns did not migrate to Kentucky for twelve years after the wedding and during this interval Bathsheba had settled down in the immediate community where her father lived. Five years before the Lincoln migration to Kentucky, Alexander Herring died so he could not have witnessed the departure and there can be no association of the migration with his parental indignation at the marriage of his daughter to Lincoln. He did live long enough to see at least three and possibly four children born to Bathsheba Lincoln, although none of the children were named for him or any of his Herring kinsmen.

It is barely possible that there has crept into the oft repeated story about the Lincoln-Herring marriage, very naturally, a prejudiced attitude as the following affidavit recently made by W. S. Fallis will imply:

"I, W. S. Fallis, am now in my seventieth year and am of sound mind and memory, and am desirous of making and do make the following statement, under oath, of my knowledge of the maiden name of the wife of Abraham Lincoln, the grandfather of the President.

"Witnesseth: That during my boyhood and for several years after I was of age I was privileged to spend much time in the home where lived the grand niece of Bathsheba Herring. This niece, an unmarried daughter of Alexander Herring and granddaughter of William Herring, a brother of Bathsheba, was Margaret D. Herring

who was born in 1810 and was a contemporary of the President.

"Being an ardent southerner she had no sympathy of the things, she felt, the President stood for and, I think, formed a personal dislike for him on account of it.

"She frequently discussed with me and in my hearing the family and their connection and always or most always spoke of the marriage of her aunt Bersheba, or Bathsheba as she called her, and Abraham Lincoln and spoke of opposition of the family to the marriage. This aunt to my certain personal knowledge knew positively that her aunt Bathsheba Herring had married the Abraham Lincoln who became the grandfather of the President and that she was the only wife of the grandfather."

It may also be said with reference to the oft circulated marriage story that the Lincolns were not inferior people as implied and not only did they marry into the Herring family but they also married into the Harrison family. It was from the Harrison family that Alexander Sr., himself had chosen his bride. In fact Hannah Lincoln, sister of pioneer Abraham Lincoln, married John Harrison, a nephew of Alexander Herring Jr., and another sister, Lydia Lincoln, also married a Harrison kinsman.

A further search through the Augusta and Rockingham records convinces one that economically the Lincolns were as well off as their neighbors. For instance in the 1792 tax report Abigail Herring listed 1

horse, 1 negro; Leonard Herring, 11 horses, 1 negro; Hannah Herring, 1 horse; Bethuel Herring, 5 horses, 2 negroes; William Herring, 7 horses, 2 negroes; Thomas Herring, 1 horse. That same year Jacob Lincoln, brother of the pioneer Abraham, listed 7 horses and 4 negroes.

It will also be noted that the Lincoln family inter-married with other members of the Herring family in later years. In the "Memoirs of Lincoln" by Herring Chrisman, it is not only set forth that the author looked to Alexander as one of his forebears on his father's side but also seemed to be proud that Joseph Chrisman, a descendant of a Herring, had married one of the daughters of Jacob Lincoln.

This marriage is one instance, however, where the story is reversed and the Lincolns become the aristocrats, according to Estelle Chrisman Laughlin of Gering, Nebraska who writes about the incident as follows: "There is also a story that the Captain Jacob Lincoln's were very aristocratic (Jacob Lincoln was a brother of Abraham, the pioneer) and did not like for their daughter Elizabeth to marry a son of a neighboring German planter, namely, Joseph Chrisman."

There is also another interesting family reaction in the Laughlin correspondence which throws much light on why no considerable interest has been taken in attempting to identify the paternal grandmother of Abraham Lincoln. With reference to the offsprings of the above mentioned Joseph Chrisman and Elizabeth Lin-

coln, it appears that one of their children was named John Lincoln Chrisman but having southern sympathies during the war, the name Lincoln was dropped from his name and never used thereafter. There were few, if any, of the Lincoln kinsmen in Virginia who were in sympathy with the views of the President.

### *Josiah Lincoln—Namesake*

One of the leads through which it has been thought some definite information about the parentage of Bathsheba might be learned is in the naming of her second son Josiah. The name cannot be associated with any of the Lincolns and it is not found among the Herrings. First it was thought that Josiah Lincoln was named for Josiah Boone which led some historians to believe that Abraham Lincoln, the pioneer, had married a daughter of Josiah Boone, who was a close neighbor in Rockingham County. A complete list of Josiah Boone's children is not available so there is no means of checking this theory.

There was a Josiah Harrison who may have been the man for whom the second son of Bathsheba Lincoln was named Josiah, thought to have been the son of Jeremiah Harrison, a brother of Abigail Harrison Herring. This Josiah Harrison was evidently a cousin of Bathsheba and was appointed to appraise the estate of both Alexander and Jesse Herring, brothers of Bathsheba.

There was also a Josiah Davidson, who lived in the immediate community when the Lincolns resided

in Rockingham County. The Davidson family claims that Edith Herring, the first wife of Josiah Davidson, was a sister of Bathsheba Herring who married Abraham Lincoln. If this tradition could be sustained over against the assertion that Bathsheba was an only daughter of Alexander Herring, we might conclude that this Josiah Davidson furnished the name Josiah for the Lincoln family.

This copy of the *Lincoln Kinsman* goes forth, as an urgent appeal for assistance, to all who may have access to Herring or Lincoln family records and especially to descendants of Mordecai Lincoln, Josiah Lincoln, Thomas Lincoln, Mary Lincoln Crume, and Nancy Lincoln Brumfield, children of Bathsheba Lincoln. Surely somewhere there must be absolute proof that the maiden name of the pioneer Abraham Lincoln's widow was Bathsheba Herring.

If the parentage of Bathsheba Lincoln, widow of the massacred pioneer, can be definitely traced to Alexander and Abigail Harrison Herring, all other claimants for paternal honors with respect to the pioneer Lincoln's children can be dismissed as void and we will have found several new American ancestors for the President, some of them reaching back into old established English families.

An excellent Virginia book source, *Settlers by the Lone Grey Trail* by J. Houston Harrison has contributed much to this compilation which gives a brief genealogical list of the Herring and Harrison ancestors, and the fifth and sixth generations of Lincolns.

**HERRING FAMILY***First Generation*

a. Alexander, ?-?.

———, Margaret.

*Second Generation*

aa. Alexander, ?-?.

Harrison, Abigail.

ab. Esther, ?-?.

Wood, ?

ac. Sarah, ?-?.

Prettyman, ?.

ad. Eady, ?-?.

*Third Generation*

aaa. Leonard, 1735-?.)

Harrison, Abigail.

aab. Alexander, (?-1779).

aac. Bathsheba, (1742-1836).

Lincoln, Abraham.

(See Lincoln Family adaaa).

aad. William, (?-1806).

aae. Jessie, (?-1781).

aaf. Bethuel, (1751-?).

(Irven or Irwin). ———

**HARRISON FAMILY***First Generation*

a. Harrison, Isaiah, (1666-1738).

1. Wright, (Towsend) Elizabeth.

2. Smith, Abigail.

*Second Generation*

aa. Isaiah, 1689?.

ab. John, 1691-1771.

———, Pheobe.

ac. Gideon, 1694-1729.

ad. Mary, 1696-1781.

Cravens, Robert.

ae. Elizabeth, 1697-?.

af. Daniel, 1701-1770.

1. Cravens, Margaret.

2. Stephenson, Sarah.

ag. Thomas, 1704-1785.

1. DeLa Haye, Jane.

2. Cravens, Sarah.

ah. Jeremiah, 1707-1777.

———, Catherine.

ai. Abigail, 1710-1734.

Herring, Alexander.

(See Herring Family aa.)

aj. Samuel, 1712-1790.

———, Mary.

**LINCOLN FAMILY***Fifth Generation*

adaaa. Abraham, 1744-1786.

(Herring), Bathsheba.

(See Herring Family aac.)

adaab. Hannah, 1748-1803.

Harrison, John.

adaac. Lydia, 1748-?.

(Bryan).

adaad. Isaac, 1750-1816.

Ward, Mary.

adaae. Jacob, 1751-1822.

Robinson, Dorcas.

adaaf. John, 1755-1835.

Yarnall, Mary.

adaag. Sarah, 1757-?.

Dean, ———.

adaah. Thomas, 1761-(1819).

Casner, Elizabeth.

adaai. Rebecca, 1767-1840.

Rymel, John.

*Sixth Generation*

adaaaa. Mordecai, 1771-1830.

Mudd, Mary.

adaaab. Josiah, 1773-1835.

Barlow, Barbara.

adaaac. Mary, ?-?.

Crume, Ralph.

adaaad. Thomas, 1778-1851.

(1) Hanks, Nancy.

(Parents of the President).

(2) Johnston, Mrs. Sarah

adaaae. Nancy, 1780-1845.

Brumfield, William.